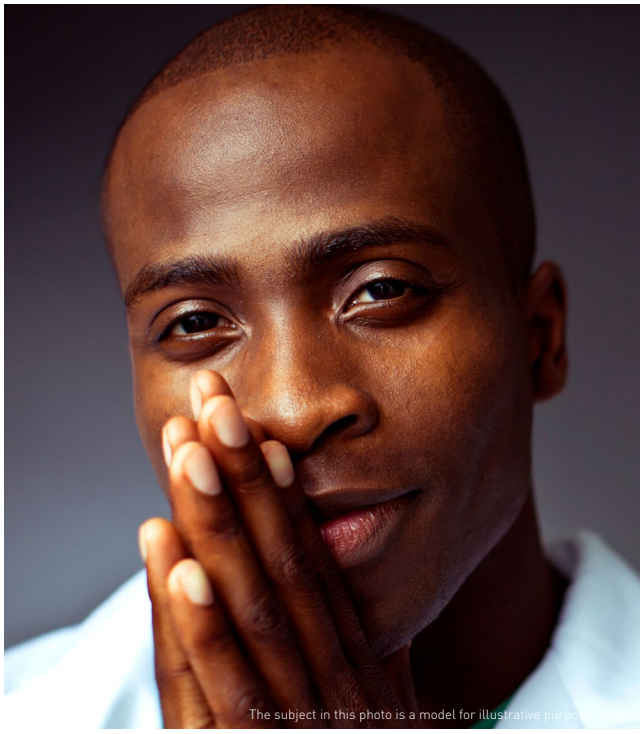
UNDERSTANDING **BIPOLAR DISORDER**

WHAT IS BIPOLAR DISORDER?



Bipolar disorder is a brain disorder that can cause unusual shifts in mood, energy, and activity levels. These shifts range from highs (manic episodes) to lows (depressive episodes). About 5.7 million American adults have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Anyone can be diagnosed with bipolar disorder at any age, but most people are diagnosed in their teens or twenties. Other risk factors include:

- A family history of bipolar disorder
- Experiencing a traumatic event
- Drug or alcohol misuse

Bipolar disorder can have a serious effect on a person's life, making it difficult to keep to a schedule, work, and maintain relationships. Bipolar mood swings can also affect sleep patterns, as well as judgment and behaviors.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Sometimes, during a severe manic or depressive episode, a person may experience psychosis—difficulty determining what is real, or not. They may also experience hallucinations—when someone sees, hears, or senses something that does not exist.

Also, people with bipolar disorder may change their view of treatment as their moods change. During a manic phase, they may believe they do not need medications and stop taking them.

Signs of a manic episode may include:

- Feeling euphoric, intensely excited, or happy
- Having more energy than usual
- Insomnia
- Speaking fast about several things at once
- Having jumbled thoughts
- Doing uncharacteristic/risky things

Signs of a depressive episode may include:

- Feeling hopeless
- Having little energy
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little
- Thoughts of death and/or suicide

TYPES OF BIPOLAR DISORDERS

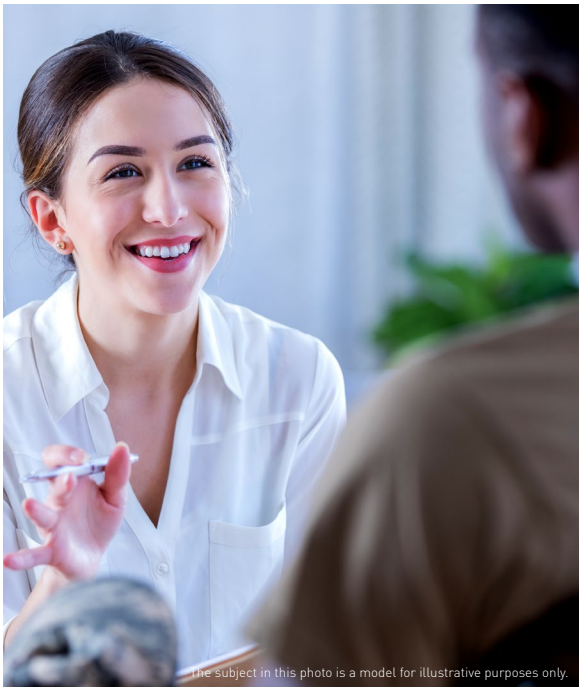
There are several types of bipolar disorder. All of them include periods of highs and lows; the major difference is how extreme the mood swings are and how long they last. In all types, there are periods between manic or depressive episodes when symptoms lessen.

- **Bipolar I Disorder:** People with bipolar I disorder have chronic mood swings that go from very high manic states to severe depressive episodes.
- **Bipolar II Disorder:** People with bipolar II disorder experience mood swings that go from high to low, but the highs are less extreme and are called hypomanic states. The depressive episodes may be just as severe as those in bipolar I disorder.
- **Cyclothymic Disorder:** A milder form of bipolar disorder, people have chronic mood swings between highs and lows that are less frequent and severe, and of shorter length than bipolar I or bipolar II.

TREATMENT

Early, accurate diagnosis can help people manage the disorder better. While bipolar disorder is a lifelong illness, it is treatable with medications, as well as therapy.

- **Medication:** Bipolar disorder is treated using different types of medications to help control symptoms, including mood stabilizers, antipsychotics, and antidepressants. People with bipolar disorder should talk with their doctor to understand the risks and benefits of the medication they are taking and report any concerns right away. They should never stop taking medication without first consulting with their doctor.
- **Psychotherapy:** Therapy is an important part of treatment. It helps people with bipolar disorder accept their illness, cope with the stresses that can trigger their symptoms, and follow a medication schedule. Therapy also helps people recognize the warning signs of a manic or depressive episode before it happens.



the subject in this photo is a model for illustrative purposes only.

NEED HELP OR MORE INFORMATION?

If you or someone you know has bipolar disorder, these resources can help. Visit **SAMHSA's Early Serious Mental Treatment Locator** and **Behavioral Health Treatment Locator** at **SAMHSA.gov**. Or, call **SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)**.

Learn more at SAMHSA.gov/Serious-Mental-Illness